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Pentagon officials detail push for aid to Nicaraguan rebels

By TIM GOLDEN

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The Reagan administration, trying to build support for renewed aid to rebels fighting to overthrow the leftist Nicaraguan government, soon will release information on a massive military buildup by the Sandinistas, Pentagon officials said Thursday.

Fred Ikle, the undersecretary of defense, outlining arguments he will make to Congress, said the Sandinista government wants the arms to intimidate neighboring countries while it directs guerrilla actions against them.

"That greater force could be used indirectly, as a shadow or ... cursive leverage to enhance the capability of guerrilla and terrorist forces," he said.

With military might and the leftist guerrilla operations as a "softening-up approach," Nicaragua may launch a "military attack" on a neighboring nation, Ikle said in an interview with United Press International,

In October, Congress set aside \$14 million in new aid to the rebels but prohibited its use unless legislators vote to resume the program after February.

"The \$64,000 question," said Assistant Secretary of Defense Nestor Sanchez, is whether newly-declassified data on Nicaragua's arms and support for Salvadoran rebels will move congressmen to back the once-covert aid.

A senior Pentagon official who asked not to be identified said Ikle would meet with key congressman over the coming weeks as part of the administration's push for the aid.

A well-informed Democratic congressional source said, "Among moderate Democrats and moderate Republicans, there's a growing frustration with the Sandinistas. There's a general feeling that the vote is very close, but nobody (in Congress) can name one person who's switched his vote."

Several Democratic congressional aides said they doubted any new information on Nicaraguan arms would offset criticism of the CIA's conduct of the covert aid program. Hearings on the program and on accusations the rebels have committed atrocities against Nicaraguan civilians are expected next month in Congress.

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